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Referendum and Pogrom

THE referendum scheduled for June 30, 1946, was, according to the law passed by the National Council of the Homeland in the latter part of April, to determine: (1) whether Poland would have a unicameral or bicameral Congress; (2) whether principles underlying nationalization of industry and agrarian reform should be incorporated into the constitution; and (3) whether Poland's permanent frontier should remain on the Oder and western Neisse rivers.

The three points to be voted on were noncontentious in so far as most Poles were concerned, with the possible exception of the first point which had as its aim the elimination of the Senate as a legislative body. As the majority of the Polish people were agriculturists, they were generally apathetic to the nationalization of industry, but in favor of agrarian reform, for they felt that the division of the large feudal states would be a progressive step toward economic recovery and would furnish every peasant with at least a small parcel of land. As to the third point, the people, who had already lost that portion of their country east of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Line to the Soviet Union, naturally desired the compensation in the north and in the west which had been promised in the Yalta and Potsdam decisions. Furthermore, the Polish Government had been permitted by the Potsdam Conference to deport Germans in that north and west territory under Polish administration. In the light of this permission the Polish Government and people assumed that, although the terms of the Potsdam decision provided that the frontier would be finally settled by the Peace Conference, there was no intention that the Germans were to return there. Otherwise, why would the deportation of the Germans be specifically authorized?

In the month before the holding of the referendum there was speculation in diplomatic circles in Warsaw whether the government and the opposition would agree on the questions involved and whether, if they did not, the government would permit the balloting and the counting of the ballots to be conducted fairly and justly.

The opposition consisted at that time of the Polish Peasant Party of Mikolajczyk and the Christian Labor Party of Karol Popiel, who had formerly held a portfolio in the Polish Government in London. These two parties finally decided to oppose the government's position on question number one on the ground that the elimination of the Senate would be contrary to the Constitution of 1921 and would, in effect, remove a valuable brake which might be used against a Communist-controlled Sejm, or Chamber of Deputies. These parties therefore urged their members to vote negatively on this question, but affirmatively on questions two and three.

Because of the significance of the procedure which might be followed in the referendum, our government urged that as many representative American newspaper and press association correspondents as possible be sent to Warsaw to report developments. Over a dozen were on hand. The Embassy arranged for teams of observers to be sent on referendum day to various districts of Poland (Kraków, Poznan, Gdansk, Kielce, Radom, Bialystok, Bydgoszcz, Łódz, Wrocław, Szczecin, Lublin, Radomsko, Katowice and the environs of Warsaw), and invited correspondents to accompany them. Thus we could obtain the most accurate picture possible of the methods employed, intimidation, if any, and the reaction of the people to the elections.

Even before the day of voting, the opposition parties were impeded in their efforts to campaign against the elimination of the Senate. Posters of the Polish Peasant Party were rarely in evidence, for in the majority of cases they had been torn down, or the bill stickers had been threatened or manhandled. And the two opposition parties were allowed little, if any, time on the government-controlled radio. The advice of Mikolajczyk to his followers to vote No on question number

one was not permitted by the government censor to be published. The Polish Peasant Party had to resort to word of mouth to advise its members of party policy. Three thousand of the party were arrested at Poznan and prevented from voting. And arrests of many other party members were reported throughout Poland. On the other hand, the government campaign slogan—"3 Razy Tak" (Three times Yes)—was posted or painted on thousands of buildings. This crude propaganda, costing the country millions of zlotys, was also spread by truckloads of subsidized men who, on the eve of the referendum, drove through the streets of the various cities shouting the political battle cry at the top of their voices.

During the morning I drove about Warsaw to observe the crowds which, orderly and good-natured, awaited their turn to vote. I visited several voting booths and noted that there was no evidence of intimidation of any sort. In the afternoon my wife and I visited neighboring villages, such as Konstancin, where the outward peacefulness of a summer Sunday gave no sign that a heated political battle, with international implications, was being waged. After returning to the Hotel Polonia I soon began to receive the first-hand reports of our observers as they came back from the districts they had visited. Some reports, because of the distances involved, were delayed for several days.

The voting which was heavy and amounted often to ninety per cent of the electorate apparently was conducted in an orderly manner with no overt intimidation. Members of the Embassy, watching the crowds outside the booths awaiting their turn to vote, were even invited by the election officials to enter the polling places. In fact, from all reports the day passed quietly and without major disturbances. The voter could mark his ballot secretly, but there was widespread fear, as our observers reported, that fraudulent means would be used in counting the ballots.

There were, indeed, provisions in the referendum law that could give rise to collusion or dishonest practices; for instance, a blank ballot was to be regarded as an affirmative vote on all three questions;

and provision was made that government organizations as well as government-controlled industries would vote in bodies. They were urged to vote three times Yes as groups. Since disobedience was punishable by loss of jobs, they voted solidly for the government's policy.

Some of our people ascertained that, in a practical manner, there were definite impediments to impartial observation. Steven Zagorski, Administrative Assistant, and Edward R. Raymond, Agricultural Attaché, had driven to Kielce to watch the procedure and the attitude of the people. They were arrested by the Security Police while they were having luncheon and, despite their protests of diplomatic immunity, they were held at headquarters for over three hours on the charge that they had distributed "antistate" handbills. They were released at last with apologies but not until the voting was over.

In the vicinity of Bialystok Lieutenant Colonel Frank Jessic, Assistant Military Attaché, was arrested by Polish troops on the charge of traveling in a forbidden area and photographing Russian troops.

John Scott, correspondent of *Time* magazine, who had come to Poland to report the referendum, was arrested near Poznan a few days before it and was held and cross-questioned for five hours by two Soviet officers. He understood Russian perfectly and was impressed by the fact that the phone conversations between these officers and the Minister of Public Security which eventually resulted in his release were conducted in Russian.

The most venal phase of the referendum procedure was in the counting of ballots. The law provided that they be counted at the polling places in the presence of representatives of all parties. But high government officials and the Security Police gave illegal orders to the electoral authorities to remove the ballot boxes, before the tabulation of votes, from the polls to the district commissioner's headquarters.

In Kraków the electoral commission appeared to have advance notice of the government's intentions. The ballots were tabulated and the results reported before the instructions were received to re-

move the ballot boxes. The government was forced to admit that in Kraków the voting was eighty-four per cent No on question number one.

With this exception, the government claimed a sweeping affirmative vote on all three questions. The four "government bloc" parties—Polish Workers Party, Polish Socialist Party, Democratic Party and Peasant Party (not to be confused with Mikolajczyk's P.S.L.)—had obediently followed the prescribed line. On the controversial question of the abolition of the Senate, the government claimed a victory of over eighty per cent; whereas, according to figures which our observers compiled independently of one another, the opposition voted No in approximately the same percentage. Even on the other questions many voted against the government on the ground that any resistance should be regarded as a healthy political sign.

The referendum served the dual purpose of testing out the electoral machinery and the possibility of diverting it to fraudulent uses. But, more important, it served as an excuse for the postponement of the elections for a further indefinite period, and so enabling the Security Police to exert an even tighter control over the country.

I reported to the Department a summary of the conclusions of our observers on the results of the referendum:

The only evidence obtainable that the referendum ballots were accurately counted, as the government press reported, came from the official statements of government officials.

The following factors indicate that the balloting was not accurately counted and reported:

(1) There is no conclusive evidence that the government enjoys more than a very minor support of the electorate. Modzelewski and others in the government have, in fact, admitted, either to this Embassy or to other diplomatic missions, that the government does not enjoy more than twenty per cent support of the electorate.

(2) The Embassy's observers reported that in the twelve different regions of the country visited, the vote, as indicated by conversations with voters, was No on the first question of the referendum.

(3) Mikolajczyk, who enjoyed a universal reputation for integrity, had publicly charged that there had been a falsification of the election results. Barcikowski, the chief of the electoral commission, stated however that the charge could not be accepted, as the referendum law made no provision for filing such charges!

On August 19, pursuant to instructions from Washington, I delivered a note to the Foreign Office, of which the following are the two pertinent paragraphs:*

The United States Government considers that it had no responsibilities in connection with the referendum held in Poland on June 30. Nevertheless, as the Polish Ambassador in Washington informed my Government on April 24, 1946, this referendum was a measure preparatory to the election, and the methods by which it was held bear a relation to the preparations for holding the election itself. The official representatives of the United States Government in Poland have reported that the voting in the referendum appeared to have been generally carried out in a correct and fair manner but that the methods used in tabulating the ballots and reporting the vote have given rise to charges of serious irregularities, including removal of ballot boxes from polling places in contravention of the referendum law. . . .

In view of the foregoing, my Government wishes to emphasize its belief that *inter alia* it is essential for the carrying out of free elections that (1) all democratic and anti-Nazi parties are allowed to conduct election campaigns freely without arrest or threat of arrest. The parties recognized as "democratic and anti-Nazi parties" include the following: The Polish Workers Party (PPR), the Democratic Party (SD), the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), the Polish Peasant Party (PSL), the Peasant Party (SL) and the Labor Party (SP); (2) all such parties are represented on all electoral commissions and ballots are counted in presence of representatives of all such parties; (3) results will be published immediately by local districts; and (4) there shall be an adequate system of appealing elections disputes. . . .

The United States Government had accordingly made it clear that it was aware that fraudulent practices, employed in the referendum,

* For the full text of the note, see Appendix.

might again be used in the elections, for which we, as well as the Polish Provisional Government, had an international responsibility.

One did not have to live more than a few weeks in Warsaw to become cynical about the designs of the Lublin group to remain permanently in power. And as the referendum was officially stated to be a forerunner of the elections it was generally anticipated that the government would score an overwhelming victory, no matter by what means it was achieved. Few people therefore were surprised by the government's announcement that the electorate had overwhelmingly voted affirmatively on the three questions to be decided.

But there was one aftermath of the referendum—a very tragic one—which had not been expected. In Kielce, in southeastern Poland on the Warsaw-Radom-Kraków road, a violent anti-Jewish disturbance had taken place on the morning of July 4. Forty Jews had been killed, as well as several members of the Polish Army and militia. The news of this pogrom reached me that afternoon during the Fourth of July reception which we were holding in the dining room and garden of the Hotel Polonia. As the first accounts were so conflicting I sent representatives to Kielce to obtain as objective and factual a report as possible. At the same time I personally interviewed members of the government, leaders of the opposition, prominent members of the Jewish community, representatives of the Joint Distribution Committee and members of the Roman Catholic hierarchy. It was on the basis of our investigations in Kielce and of these conversations that I reported my findings to the Department of State.

Kielce is a charming old town situated on a hill overlooking the fertile valley to the south, famous for its sixteenth-century cathedral. Before the war it had a population of about sixty thousand, twenty thousand of whom were Jews. During the war, however, due to the Nazi policy of exterminating the Jewish race, almost all the Jews had disappeared. In July 1946 only about two hundred fifty Jews were living in Kielce, most of them in one apartment house; half of them had been repatriated from Russia.

For many weeks before the pogrom, a strong anti-Semitic feeling had been developing in Kielce with credence being given to vicious rumors, such as: the Warsaw Government was dominated by Jews; the few Jews living in Kielce all had been repatriated from the Soviet Union and were not Polish Jews but Russian Communists; Jews were receiving preference in the distribution of UNRRA and other relief supplies; the Jews were engaged in the ritual murders of Polish Gentile children. These rumors must have reached the government, for we learned from government sources in Warsaw that as far back as May the Security Police in Kielce had been warned by the Ministry of Public Security that trouble was brewing and that an uprising might be expected.

Almost all the sources available to us were in agreement that on July 1—the day after the referendum—a small Polish boy about eight years old had disappeared from his home and did not return until the evening of July 3, when he told his family that he had been kept a prisoner in the cellar of a Jewish home and had seen the bodies of Polish children there. The boy's father took him to police headquarters at Kielce on the following morning—July 4—where the boy told his story. He accompanied members of the militia to the house where he had been held, and pointed out the man who had been responsible for his detention. The militia then arrested the Jew and, under instructions from the U.B., encircled the house, entered it and searched for weapons.

Quickly, as a result of the militia's action, the report spread throughout the town that Jewish ritual murders of Polish children had been committed, and a crowd of about four thousand indignant persons gathered outside the apartment house where the accused Jew, as well as over a hundred others of his race, resided.

There was discrepancy in the reports as to whether the Jews in the building had opened fire on the militia from the windows of the house when they insisted on being admitted. Most of the Gentile sources we consulted insisted that the Jewish tenants had become terrified by the presence of the militia and the gathering of the crowd, had lost

their heads and fired in self-defense. Jewish sources, on the other hand, were equally insistent that no shots were fired by the Jews but that they had been ordered downstairs by the militia, who were unable to maintain their formation and were powerless therefore to prevent the Jews from being brutally clubbed to death by the infuriated crowd. But almost all sources agreed that the militia had been responsible to a great extent for the massacre, not only in failing to keep order but in the actual killing of the victims, for many had been shot or bayoneted to death.

Although the violence of the pogrom might have given the impression that the tragic happening was due primarily to uncontrolled racial passions, both government and antigovernment sources admitted that it was not spontaneous, but a carefully organized plot.

Premier Osóbka-Morawski told me on July 10 that underground "bands" had been responsible for the outbreak and that "reactionary and clerical elements" had been infuriated by the result of the referendum. In reporting Osóbka's remarks to the Department of State, I gave it as my personal opinion that it would be more accurate to say that the people generally were infuriated by what they regarded as the falsification of the referendum results.

Berman also, in a talk I had with him on July 11, held that the Kielce pogrom was part of a general plan on the part of the underground bands—specifically the National Armed Forces (N.S.Z.) and Freedom and Independence (W.I.N.)—to create dissension against the government throughout the country; and that it was a direct result of dissatisfaction over the outcome of the referendum.

Vice-Premier Gomulka, Secretary General of the Communist Polish Workers Party, on July 7 gave the government's official view, which endeavored to link Mikolajczyk with the instigation of the pogrom:

The policy of negation pursued by the Polish Peasant Party and the National Armed Forces, having been unable to win a victory in the referendum, is now tending to push the struggle into the abyss of civil war and anarchy. Evidence of this is the pogrom of the Jews in Kielce. The Polish fascists who until now were so enthusiastic whenever they

saw M. Mikolajczyk have now surpassed their masters, the Nazis, in spreading anti-Semitism in Poland.

On the other hand, independent sources held that the pogrom was prepared by the government to provoke difficulties for the opposition, especially among Jewish circles in the United States. The government, they claimed, figured that the falsifying of referendum returns would be overshadowed by the more spectacular and tragic event of the pogrom—with all those American and British correspondents in Poland!

Whether or not this conjecture was correct, the correspondents were quick to grasp the news value of the Kielce murders. So, emphasis in the United States press was placed on the anti-Semitism still existing in Poland, rather than on the significance of the rigging of the referendum.

An American citizen of the Jewish race in whom I have the greatest confidence for intellectual honesty and loyalty to the United States, expressed to me his private opinion that the pogrom could have been averted had the chief of the Security Police in Kielce not given the order to search the apartment house, and had the senior U.B. officer and the Roman Catholic clergy taken some action to calm the mob.

When I visited Cardinal Hlond, the Primate of Poland, on July 8, he was deeply indignant over the Kielce massacre. He said he would give a statement to this effect to the American press correspondents in Warsaw, in order to allay the unfortunate impression that the hierarchy had condoned it. The absence of the Bishop of Kielce, Monsignor Kaczmarek, at the time of the pogrom had created the belief in the minds of some people that the Church was indifferent to the tragic fate of the murdered Jews.

But the statement which the Cardinal gave to the correspondents on July 11 provoked further violent attacks against the Church. Cardinal Hlond indicated in it that the Polish Government was itself responsible for much of the anti-Semitic feeling in the country through the unpopularity of its policies and actions in which the Jews

played a prominent part. The government-controlled press immediately interpreted this statement as a defense of the pogrom.

The trial of the twelve persons charged with responsibility was held in Kielce from July 9 to July 11 before a military court. The prosecution indicated that "reactionary" bands had been accountable for the uprising, but as the defendants were all civilians the jurisdiction of the court was questioned by some of the lawyers for the defendants. Nine of the defendants received death sentences, which were immediately carried out, while a woman, a man and a youth of about twenty years of age who appeared to be of an abnormally low mentality, received sentences of ten years, seven years and life imprisonment, respectively.

The Prime Minister informed me on July 10 that the Vice-Governor, the chief of the Security Police, and the chief of the militia at Kielce had all been arrested under the Premier's personal orders because of their having permitted the pogrom to take place; and Ambassador Lange, who was in Warsaw on a consultative visit, told me that the government considered the militia largely responsible. Yet no members of the militia were brought to trial.

My belief, after sifting various reports which came to me, including those from Polish-speaking members of the Embassy whom I had sent to Kielce to attend the trial, was that the underlying cause of the pogrom was the growing anti-Semitism which, even our Jewish sources admitted, was caused by the great unpopularity of the Jews in key government positions. These men included Minc, Berman, Olszewski (whose real name was said to be Specht), Radkiewicz and Spychalski. Our Jewish friends said that the Jews in Poland had little regard for the government and resented the implication that the Jews in it were representative of their people. I told the Department of State that, from the reports received, I believed there was bitter feeling within the militia against the Jews because the Security Police, controlled by Radkiewicz, dominated the militia and the Army, and a Russian general, Kiziewicz, dominated the Internal Security Police (K.B.W.). It

was known, furthermore, that both the U.B. and K.B.W. had, among their members, many Jews of Russian origin.

Although I had no definite proof that the government instigated the Kielce pogrom, I wondered, in view of the unbelievably inefficient manner in which the U.B. and the militia had handled the affair, whether it might not have seriously welcomed the opportunity to denounce, as responsible parties, its principal critics, including the Roman Catholic Church, Mikolajczyk and the underground movement.

Before the war anti-Semitism had become more active in Poland, but chiefly for economic reasons—jealousy of the Jews' acknowledged superiority in the realm of commerce.

But, were it not for the unpopularity of the Jews within the Provisional Government of National Unity, the anti-Jewish feeling was bound to have diminished. Because of the decrease of the Jewish population, through the Nazi extermination of Polish Jews at the Oswiecim, Majdanek and Buchenwald concentration camps, and during the razing of the Warsaw Ghetto in April 1943, the Jews could no longer be considered an economic menace. From a prewar population of four million Jews, Poland in August 1945 had only fifty thousand left. Perhaps two hundred thousand more were to be repatriated from the Soviet Union. Warsaw, which had had a population of three hundred fifty thousand Jews, had only five thousand after the war.

As Polish Jews were being repatriated from the Soviet Union in the winter of 1945, often in open freight cars, a serious situation confronted our military authorities in the United States zones of occupation in Germany and Austria. In December 1945, for instance, three hundred Jews were arriving daily in our zone in Bavaria and two hundred and fifty in our zone in Berlin, claiming they had fled for fear of persecution because of their race, religion or political beliefs. They intensified the United States Army's difficulties of housing and

feeding by the influx of about fifteen thousand displaced persons a month.

Their exodus from Poland was voluntary, for there was no incentive for them to remain: their relatives and friends had disappeared; there was no opportunity to enter their former occupations; and there was the traditional fear of anti-Semitic hatred. As Dr. Sommerstein, the head of the former Jewish Party, put it, Poland was now a Jewish cemetery. Besides, having experienced in the Soviet Union the terrors of a Communist police state, they had no inclination to live under the Polish variety. In fact we were informed by Jewish relief officials that not more than five per cent of the repatriated Polish Jews were Communistic in their viewpoint.

Shortly after our arrival in Warsaw the government-controlled *Głos Ludu* announced on August 14, 1945, that a serious anti-Jewish demonstration had taken place in Kraków, that some Jews attending a synagogue service had been beaten, and that the synagogue had been set on fire. In its issue of the fifteenth, *Głos Ludu* stated that "reactionaries" were responsible for the outbreak as a protest against the agrarian reform measures of the government.

Some independent sources, however, claimed in talks with members of our Embassy that anti-Jewish demonstrations were Soviet-inspired so as to give the Red Army a pretext to remain indefinitely in the country for the purpose of preserving order. But an investigation which I myself made in Kraków in October 1945, through numerous interviews, convinced me that the alleged Kraków pogrom was an isolated demonstration of ill feeling which broke out because of the irresponsible acts of young hoodlums who had stoned some Jews leaving the synagogue.

Although it was most difficult for a Polish Gentile to obtain permission to leave the country unless he had legitimate business abroad which would benefit the government, Polish Jews might leave quite freely, without passports and without any restrictions at the frontier. Those who were being repatriated from Russia were generally assembled at Łódź and then traveled in groups to the Czechoslovak

frontier whence they would proceed to Austria or Germany. Many of them had no definite ultimate destination. All they desired was to leave Poland and, after the Kielce pogrom, the exodus increased to the rate of seven hundred per day.

In August 1946, because of the critical phase of the housing situation in our zones in Austria and Germany, I was instructed by Washington to try to obtain the co-operation of the Polish Government in curbing the exodus of the Jewish emigrants in their own interest. The government informed Mr. William Bein, director of the Joint Distribution Committee in Poland, and me that attempts were being made to settle seventy-five thousand Jews in Silesia but that it could not force the Jews to remain in Poland where they feared they might be the victims of further outbreaks. However, I could not escape the conclusion, because of the Polish Government's tacit permission to the Jews to leave the country without observing the usual passport and visa requirements, that it welcomed their exodus. This feeling was confirmed when Schwalbe, Vice-President of the National Council of the Homeland, told me he thought the Jewish infiltration into the American zone of Germany was a carefully planned maneuver to influence the United States Government to put pressure on the British Government to open up Palestine to Polish Jewish displaced persons.

The result of the referendum, the Kielce pogrom and the executions of the defendants combined to bring about a noticeable increase in political tension. This was aggravated by the refusal of Prime Minister Osóbka-Morawski to permit a meeting of the Christian Labor Party scheduled for July 19. Mr. Popiel, the president of the party, in the face of this negation of freedom of assembly, suspended the party's activities. Thus only Mikolajczyk's Polish Peasant Party remained in the field in opposition to the government.

That the government intended to continue to consolidate its position, regardless of any protests which the United States and British governments might make under the Yalta and Potsdam decisions, was evidenced by a statement made by President Bierut to W. H. Lawrence,

staff correspondent of the *New York Times*, on July 19. In this interview he came close to saying that I was *persona non grata*, charging that I had little understanding of the Polish people and could not or would not appreciate their problems. This attack was unprecedented in that a chief of state criticized an accredited representative of a friendly government through the press, rather than through official channels. It was dismissed by the Acting Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, on August 3, with the dry comment: "Ambassador Lane continues to enjoy the complete confidence of this government."

The general view in Washington, as interpreted by the Associated Press, was that relations between the United States and Poland were destined to become more tense as the elections drew nearer.